

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Thursday, February 24th, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and other members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm writing to explain to you the complexities of mental health and how you can help. Mental health stigma exists because the mainstream public does not understand that mental illness is a biochemical brain imbalance which can be treated successfully with the right medication, just like a physical illness. There has been some press about the need to treat mental illness before tragedies occur, but this has often just encouraged people to focus on the violent aspect of a mental illness, which for the most part is an invalid belief. Mental illness is often compared to diabetes by professionals. When someone's glucose is out of balance that person needs a little more insulin. Likewise, because of the chemical balance in the brain, people who are challenged by a mental illness need medication to offset the imbalance. In addition, this type of illness is a lot more common than once thought. Because of the stigma, people are often embarrassed and wary of judgment, so they are not open about their invisible disability. Did you know 1 in 5 people in the United States are affected by mental illness? Some people are becoming enlightened to these facts. However, many, many people do not understand this, and they are not open to finding out. Instead, they choose to focus on the violent behavior that only a fraction of us, with mental illnesses exhibit. In addition, this type of illness is a lot more common than most people realize. There are many different types of disorders, synonymous with the word illnesses, ranging from

Schizophrenia and Bipolar which are often misunderstood and feared to more commonly known but still misunderstood, Depression and Anxiety. Comments like, “You’re so paranoid. Why can’t you just snap out of it?” are often heard by the unwell person. The person making judgements doesn’t realize that anxiety can creep up on a person for no reason. What we need in this state is education, starting in the elementary schools, and more complete and all encompassing in the high schools, and especially our colleges, where often the quarter-life crisis takes a toll and mental health challenges begin. They say, money is power, well believe me, as a college graduate, an education goes a long way, too.

What would it take for you legislators on the Appropriations Committee, that we put in power to advocate for us, to do two things for CT citizens? What’s that you ask? Put money toward educating youth and adults and families about mental illness **AND** put money toward programs that already exist, that DO understand the difficulties faced by the many whom mental health plagues.

What programs? Let’s take Teamworks, the clubhouse of Reliance Health for example: This a safe place where people with mental health conditions can socialize and congregate, opposed to isolate. Isolation leads to hospital stays, a cost the state incurs that could be easily avoided with enrollment at Teamworks, and other clubhouses like it. Right off the bat, you can see Teamworks’s value, but let me continue.

Teamworks Clubhouse is a quiet and supporting “No Judgement Zone.” Staff offer engagement and support to all members. Members also support each other. Teamworks is not

just a clubhouse, it is a COMMUNITY. Something always needed. Perhaps more than ever in this disruptive Covid Era. The following are some of the groups offered at Teamworks, in a safe and confidential venue: Art Therapy, Men's Group, Anger Management, Recovery For Life, Cooking Matters, and Coffee Talk. In addition, Teamworks provides community outings such as: hiking, bowling, museums, fairs, and pottery barns. Often, a trip with the group puts a smile on the members' faces and connects them with a friend.

So, as you can see, Teamworks is a very important place, not only for my comrades and me but for the state as it is keeping people out of the hospitals and in society as productive citizens, working toward generating income for the state. Because they are well enough to have jobs, they can reciprocate any money the appropriations committee chooses to invest in them to support their wellness. All the while the Committee will be taking a role in breaking down barriers, aiding everyone in success.

Thankyou. It's time to pay attention to this serious matter.